



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT**

**Statement by Ms. Roberta Cohen  
U.S. Delegation to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
October 7, 2003**

Mr. Moderator, with a few exceptions, freedom of movement is not a major problem in OSCE States.

Nevertheless, the U.S. delegation is concerned about the re-imposition of exit visas in Turkmenistan which represents a serious regression to Soviet-era practices and violates OSCE commitments, including the Vienna commitment that everyone has a right to "leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." Turkmen authorities have claimed that only criminals, individuals privy to state secrets and those with outstanding debts to the state are prevented from freely exiting the country. In fact, many individuals are unable to obtain exit visas for routine travel and there are credible reports that many have to pay bribes to obtain these documents. We trust and expect – as we have been assured by Turkmen authorities – that the re-imposition of exit visas is only a temporary measure and that citizens of Turkmenistan will soon be able once again to leave their country without prior permission from their government.

In Uzbekistan, the government also requires exit visas – sometimes issued selectively – and severely limits the right to change permanent residence in country. Permission from local authorities is required in order to resettle in a new city, and the authorities rarely grant permission to those who wish to move to Tashkent. Local observers report that a bribe of roughly \$100 (96,529 soum) is necessary to obtain the required registration documents. Again, this is contrary to Uzbekistan's Vienna commitment that everyone has the right to "freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State."

In Belarus, the authorities delayed issuing "global" exit visas to some opposition activists. In June, the authorities refused to issue an exit visa to Andrei Klimov, a former deputy of the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme Soviet who was jailed for 4 ½ years. The regime also delayed issuing passports to opposition politicians, sometimes for several months, in an effort to restrict their travel abroad for political activities.

In Russia, we note that some regional governments continue to restrict the right to freedom of internal movement through residential registration rules that closely resemble the Soviet-era "propiska" (pass) regulations. One of the most difficult situations is that faced by the Meskhetian Turks currently residing in southern Russia. Although many are entitled to citizenship and residence permission, they have been refused proper documentation by local authorities.

In the Russian Federation, Meskhetian Turks living in Krasnodar Kray, like other ethnic minorities, must register as "guests" every 45 days and may not legally register the purchase of a house or car. Their marriages and deaths are not officially recorded. Most are denied education above secondary school, as well. In 2002, authorities in the Krasnodar administration took measures, corresponding

with the expiration of the temporary registration held by most Krasnodar Meskhetian Turks, that reportedly cancelled leases on land or denied lease renewals for the 2002 crop season. In an apparent attempt to pressure Meskhetian Turks to leave, the Krasnodar regional legislature enacted a series of laws that banned residence registration for “stateless persons,” envisaged more intensive passport and residence checks, and required strict administrative control over the issue of papers certifying land possession. By not granting citizenship or providing permanent residency status, current Russian policy enables violations of the rights of Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar Kray to continue.

The United States urges the Russian Federation to extend to Meskhetian Turks their rights according to the Russian Constitution, and to intervene to ensure that Krasnodar Kray officials desist in their discriminatory treatment of the Meskhetian Turks and normalize their status. We also urge other OSCE participating States to normalize the status of other stateless persons.

While recognizing the necessity to control sovereign borders and guard against security threats, the U.S. delegation urges OSCE States to conscientiously implement the relevant freedom of movement provisions of OSCE documents.

In closing, we may want to consider holding one of our Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings next year on the issue of Freedom of Movement.